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JOHN DEE.

John Dee (1527-1608). By Charlotte Fell Smith. Pp. xvi+342. (London: Constable and Co., Ltd., 1909.) Price 10s. 6d. net.

IN the personal history of learning there is probably no more interesting or more perplexing figure than the subject of this book. The story of John Dee reads more like a romance by Sue or a *feuilleton* by the elder Dumas than as a sober, veracious narrative of an actual human career. The achievements of the man, his learning, the range of his knowledge, his aberrations, his vicissitudes of good and evil fortune—mainly evil—taken together, make up a tale which has hardly a parallel in biographical literature, certainly not in the biography of science.

There is a time-honoured adage that a man is to be judged by the company he keeps. John Dee certainly mixed in very questionable company during one period of his extraordinary career, and his memory has greatly suffered from that circumstance. Although he enjoyed the patronage, and to some extent the protection, of the great—mainly from motives of self-interest—his contemporaries for the most part looked askance at his performances, and his life in consequence became a continuous and prolonged struggle with prejudice, misrepresentation, and slander.

Miss Fell Smith may be congratulated unreservedly on her work. Even in this age, which has witnessed many attempts to reverse the adverse judgment of a man's fellows, it needed some courage to try to rehabilitate John Dee in the good opinion of posterity. But, by treating her subject in the spirit of science, that is, by patiently investigating the facts, carefully sifting and weighing the evidence, and skilfully unravelling the tangled web of truth and fiction which has hitherto enveloped his history, his latest biographer has for the first time succeeded in laying bare his true character, and in revealing the hidden springs and motives of his actions. In the record she has put together, Miss Fell Smith has elaborated her testimony and presented the case for the panel, as the Scotch say, with no ordinary literary ability, and the dispassionate reader must admit that she has succeeded in clearing the old philosopher's memory from the charges of deceit, dissimulation, and knavery which lay heavy on it.

In reality, John Dee was a man born out of due season. His age was not ready for him. In the times of the Tudors there was no place in the body politic for the professed man of science, unless he practised his science covertly as a physician or a priest. Even then its pursuit was attended with a considerable measure of personal peril. John Dee, it is true, dabbled in medicine, as he dabbled in most things that had any connection with the science of his period, and he was thereby of occasional service to his suffering fellows. For a time, too, his only means of subsistence came from a couple of wretchedly endowed country livings to which he was presented.

But he was never recognised as a practising physician, or as a professed priest. His life's work was the pursuit of truth merely for the sake of elucidating it, an occupation unintelligible to his age. Apparently every aspect or form of truth was of equal importance to him; but, naturally enough, the direction in which he searched was influenced by his environment and the circumstances of his time. It was inevitable that such a man should sooner or later come into conflict with his age—a hard, unrelenting, pitiless age; and it was equally inevitable that he should be worsted in the fight. The spectacle of a strong man struggling with adversity is, we are told, a sight loved by the gods. We cannot help thinking that it is the spectacle of a sorely tried albeit misguided man, bent and well-nigh broken by the storms of fate, that has touched and quickened the womanly sympathy of the author of this book. Its compilation has evidently been a labour of love, or of the pity which is akin to it. Every page bears testimony to the patient care and trained skill with which the author has searched all available records and followed every clue which might serve to unravel the mystery of her hero's life.

John Dee was born in London in 1527. His father, Rowland Dee, was a gentleman server in the court of Henry VIII. The boy was sent to the Chantry School at Chelmsford, and thereafter, at the age of fifteen, to St. John's College, Cambridge, where he graduated in 1546, and was made a fellow of Trinity at its foundation by Henry VIII. Two years later, after taking his M.A. degree, he entered the University of Louvain, and thence passed on to Paris, where he gave lectures at the university on Euclid. Returning to England, he produced one or two astronomical works, and a book on the cause of the tides, presumably for the use of Edward VI. On the accession of Mary he got into trouble, and was thrown into prison on a charge of magic, and eventually of treason, and stood his trial by the Star Chamber. Nothing could be proved against him, and he was liberated, only to be handed over to the tender mercies of Bishop Bonner. He escaped even this ordeal, and subsequently presented Mary with a project for the establishment of a great national library in which to preserve "the treasure of all antiquity," the priceless collections of ancient literature which had been scattered by the dissolution of the monasteries and religious houses. Nothing came of the suggestion at the time. A couple of centuries had to elapse before the British Museum was founded, and it was only in the opening years of Queen Victoria's reign that keepers of the public records were appointed and the Historical Manuscripts Commission was brought into existence.

Easier times came to Dee with the advent of Elizabeth. He was already well known to her. She had corresponded with him when confined to Woodstock. His position as a mathematician had been established, and the name of the editor of Billingsley's "Euclid" was known throughout the learned world. The friend of Mercator—"my Gerard," as he calls him—he was esteemed, too, as a geographer skilled in cartography, and was constantly consulted by the

great sea-captains of his time—Gilbert, Davis, Frobisher, Hawkins, Cavendish, and others of the remarkable band that created the sea-power of England. Dee had settled at Mortlake, where he was frequently visited by the Queen. Elizabeth had ever an eye for a comely man, and Dee was remarkably handsome, tall, stately, and of a dignified mien. The picture which Miss Fell Smith draws of his home life there, with his second wife—"his painful Jane," as he calls her, the staunchest, truest friend he ever had—with the great Queen, either when "taking the ayre" or when on her way from Hampton Court or Isleworth to her palace at Greenwich, cantering up to his garden gate in order to get sight and speech of her courtly philosopher, is a charming piece of word-painting. But these were not altogether halcyon days for Dee. Elizabeth was gracious, even profuse in promise, but she was a very niggard in performance, and her astrologer was occasionally hard put to for the means of living.

Edward Kelley—*alias* Talbot—clipper, coiner, forger, and thief, now appears upon the scene, and the aspect of things becomes very grim. This man was Dee's evil genius. Their connection is one of the most astonishing and perplexing circumstances of his history. How Kelley could have acquired such complete ascendancy over his patron is almost inexplicable. Kelley was a first-class ne'er-do-well, a lover of loose company and of strong waters, and a consummate liar. He professed to be a clairvoyant, a skryer, or crystal-gazer, and Dee's passion for occultism was such that no tale of mystery or message from the spirit world was too gross or outrageous for him to swallow, as his own records of their *séances* demonstrate. Dee was an operative alchemist of no mean reputation, and the supposition is that Kelley sought to worm himself into Dee's confidence in order to gain information concerning the manufacture of the philosopher's stone, about which Dee never professed any knowledge. It is impossible here to go into any detail of the extraordinary partnership into which the pair entered, or to tell how they were induced, mainly at the instigation of a Polish adventurer, to wander, with their wives and Dee's children, on to the Continent, through Holland, North Germany, Poland, and eventually to Prague, where Kelley took service under Rudolph II., the "Hermes of Germany."

The story of that morose, half-witted, loose-living fanatic, who secluded himself for years in his gloomy palace at Prague, occupying himself with astrology, thaumaturgy, alchemy, necromancy, and every other form of aberration of which the human mind was then capable, is one of the most striking chapters in the book. Here Kelley was in a congenial atmosphere; he became wealthy—how is not very clear—flourished, in fact, like the bay tree, and was ennobled, only to fall more rapidly than he rose. He had previously shaken off Dee; he had no further use for him. The poverty-stricken, disillusioned man, after six years' wandering over Europe, now set his face once more towards Mortlake, only to find that, in his absence, his precious library of 4000 volumes had been rifled, and his instruments and apparatus broken by his neighbours. Well might he exclaim:—

"Have I so long, so dearly, so farre, so carefully, so painfully, so dangerously, fought and travailed for the learning of wisdom and atteyning of vertue, and in the end am I become worse than when I began? Call you this to be learned? Call you this to be a philosopher and a lover of wisdom?"

Could anything be more dramatic? The peaceful home on the banks of the Thames, into whose "silver" stream Dee's children occasionally tumbled without risk of being poisoned by the filth of Brentford; the surprise visits of the Queen; the advent of Kelley, and with him all the ghastly, skrying, crystal-gazing business—just as it is done to-day in Bond Street—communings with Annael, Anachor, Anilos, Uriel the Spirit of Light, Bobogel, Michael with his fiery sword, Gabriel, Raphael, Il, Ave, and the rest. Then comes Madimi, the first of the female angels who appeared to the pair, sometimes as "a pretty girl of seven or nine years attired in a gown of Sey, changeable green and red, with a train," and at other times as "a wench in white," and who had learned Greek, Arabic, and Syrian on purpose to be useful. Next enters the Mephisto of the story—Laski, the Polish adventurer, introduced by an angel named Jubanladec—who enjoined him to "live better and see himself inwardly." At his solicitation the pair decide to go with him to Poland. Then comes the journey across Holland, and along the devious peat-coloured waterways of East Friesland and out to sea by the islands up to Embden, and so to Oldenburg, Bremen, and Lubeck. Thence to Cracow, and eventually to Prague, where we have the mad Emperor, and all the diabolical doings in chicanery and fraud which bring the cropped-eared Kelley to his end. Lastly, we have the return of Dee—a ruined man, cheated by those he trusted, shunned by his acquaintance, scorned by his enemies—to the wrecked house at Mortlake he called home.

What a phantasmal tragedy it all seems! And yet it is sober history, capable of being verified in detail, as Miss Fell Smith demonstrates in her vivid, scholarly, and deeply interesting narrative.

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THE PRECIOUS METALS.

The Precious Metals, comprising Gold, Silver, and Platinum. By Dr. T. Kirke Rose. Pp. xvi+295. (London: A. Constable and Co., Ltd., 1909.) Price 6s. net.

DR. ROSE, as is well known, is the author of the chief text-book on the metallurgy of gold; a book on the "Precious Metals" from his pen is, therefore, most welcome, and although in dealing with this subject details of processes and methods are for the most part left out, yet nothing of importance as introductory to the study of these metals is omitted.

The author states in the preface that his aim "has been to provide an introduction to the study of the precious metals and an elementary book of reference for those who do not wish to pursue the subject further." This aim has been admirably attained.